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FIG. 1. DELFT TILES, MIDDLE OF XVII CENTURY

DUTCH TILES



FIG. 2.—DELFT TILE, MIDDLE OF XVII CENTURY

THE art of tile making found congenial soil in Holland, that country of frequent down-pours, where the walls of the houses scarcely dry out, where gray tones predominate in

earth and sky and the people, as a consequence crave light, cheerful objects.

In the first half of the seventeenth century, when the best tiles were produced, they were used but sparingly for the ornamentation of rooms. We can see their application in the paintings of Jan Vermeer, Pieter de Hooch, Metsu, and others. Fig. 3, for instance, shows a design of grapes reproduced in one of Metsu's most famous pictures, the "Letter-Writer," in the Beit Collection; while tiles with ships and soldiers are to be found in the painting by Pieter de Hooch, "Girl with Two Cavaliers," in the National Gallery, London. A row of tiles was frequently let in around the base of the walls of a room, serving the purpose of a skirting board, although sometimes smaller wall spaces in bedrooms, corridors, and kitchens were inlaid to the height of four or five feet. They were used to ornament the projecting walls around the fireplace also, and indeed sometimes covered the background above the iron fireback. They formed, too, a practical material for stoves,

as rust stains could be easily washed off, and their glazed surface radiated the warmth freely.

Close inspection of a tile soon reveals whether the brush has been firmly and freely wielded by an artist's hand, or by the hand of a copyist painfully following a model. As a matter of fact, tradition has it that painters such as Frydom and Abraham de Kooze indulged in tile painting, and in Delft, the center of the pottery industry, the two arts undoubtedly exercised a mutual influence. One has only to recall the work of Jan Vermeer whose notable preference for blue, white, and yellow is characteristic of the Delft pottery makers. It seems not unlikely that he himself decorated pottery, his somewhat glassy technique bearing out this suggestion.

One can trace three distinct periods in the development of the Dutch art of tile making. The first extending from about 1580 to 1630; the second from 1630 to 1670, and the third, summarily speaking, from the end of the seventeenth to the end of the eighteenth century. In the first group (Fig. 3, p. 237), the decorative character is emphasized, the pattern is bold and vigorous and covers the entire surface. A warm yellow, a reddish brown, deep blue, and copper hues predominate in the coloring. During the second phase (Figs. 1, 2), which was contemporary with the highest achievements of Dutch painting, the designs are most diversified. Besides the floral motives, which have become more realistic without losing in purity of style, there are portrayed soldiers, workmen, sea monsters, and, above all, ships. The *horror vacui* of the earlier period, which demanded the covering of the entire surface, has disappeared.

Only one motive is employed—a flower, a single figure, or a ship, poised lightly and freely and emphasizing to the full the value of the white background. The tone of the decoration is blue, the beautiful Delft blue that was only produced in this second half of the seventeenth century. The technique is perfect, the white milky and dazzling, the glaze luminous without being glassy.

During the third period a manganese violet became the predominating shade, a feeble, insipid color, typical of the rococo manner. The simple, decorative character became obscured, and the influence of painting, which in Holland was disastrous to the plastic art, was unfavorably felt. Whole compositions portraying animated scenes especially of a Biblical or pastoral character are crowded on to one tile. At the same time there reappeared rich but broken and vague decorative motives depicting rococo foliage and flower designs in the somewhat clumsy and ungracious Dutch manner, the design extending over several rows of tiles.

There is no doubt that the technique of

the early tiles is borrowed directly from the Italian Urbino and Faenza ware. Whether this influence came through Antwerp, where an Italian master, Guido da Savino, was established, or from Seville, where a flourishing Italian factory maintained relations with the Dutch workshops, cannot here be decided. The tiles of the second period were similarly, although not so strongly, influenced by Chinese porcelain. One recognizes this first in the predominance of blue which displaced the other colors, and also in the patterns which in part were taken bodily from Chinese designs.

A small collection of about two hundred tiles, recently acquired by the Museum, displays the development of the art from its beginnings at the end of the sixteenth century to its decline at the beginning of the nineteenth century. Almost all the various types are represented, the earlier and rarer pieces being especially numerous, as they are the predecessors of the Dutch pottery vases and throw light on the beginnings of that art.

W. V.



DELFT TILE, XVII CENTURY



THE OXBOW OF THE CONNECTICUT, NEAR NORTHAMPTON, BY THOMAS COLE